

PACRO explores plant progress, delays

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The Paducah Area Community Reuse Organization on Wednesday reported mixed results on projects at the Paducah Gaseous Diffusion Plant.

The executive committee of PACRO, the organization intended to mitigate the impact of the plant's closure, met at the Commerce Center to update members.

Director Charlie Martin said that plans for Global Laser Enrichment, a subsidiary of GE-Hitachi, to construct and operate a laser enrichment plant at the site are moving forward. The Kentucky Department of Fish and Wildlife Services voted earlier this month to allow Gov. Steve Beshear's office to pursue the project on a 665-acre tract adjacent to the plant.

But cleanup isn't going as well, Martin said. The Department of Energy, which leases the site to the United States Enrichment Corp., has yet to award a key contract.

"We thought the IDIQ (indefinite delivery/indefinite quantity) contract was going to be issued pretty soon. It's going to take awhile," Martin told committee members. In the meantime, "we're encouraging the DOE to award to the other contractors out there so work can begin."

In a letter last month, Sens. Mitch McConnell and Rand Paul and Rep. Ed Whitfield pressured the DOE to execute the IDIQ contract and to make decommissioning and decontamination of the plant a priority in the coming fiscal year.

Martin said that if the money Congress appropriated for the site cleanup isn't spent during the 2014 fiscal year, which ends Sept. 30, it will be rolled into 2015. If that happens, it will be much more difficult to get Congress to maintain or increase cleanup funding in 2015.

"Getting money spent as soon as possible on the ground to begin cleanup is really important to us," Martin said.

The plant is already looking at reduced cleanup funding in 2015, according to the DOE's budget highlights. Its 2015 request for the Paducah site is \$269,773, down from this year's allotment of \$324,524.

The committee briefly discussed the latest round of layoffs at USEC, which will put another 360 workers out of a job by the end of April. Martin said that if the DOE were to spend the allotted funds by awarding a new contract or expanding existing contracts, it would go a long way toward alleviating the unemployment problem.

In other business, chairwoman Gayle Kaler moved to approve recommendations to change PACRO's bylaws, allowing for the restructuring of PACRO's committees and board of directors.

The aim was to make the board more efficient and productive by reducing its size to 15 members. The committee voted unanimously in favor of the changes.